THE DECISIONS BEHIND THE PACADE

Florence C. Rowe 27 January 1978

> Mr. G. Berg Practicum in Sweet Briar History Winter Term 1978

Horerce C. Roue "D Pledge"

In the designing of any building, its aesthetic qualities are of major importance. 'It is often an expensive consideration, and compromises must be made between these qualities and those of usefulness when a budget is involved. Here is the story of the main buildings at Sweet Briar College, and some of the decisions made which make the campus the practical and attractive place that it is. We have an excellent learning and living facility for a school of our size, and our reputation stands not only on our faculty, both past and present, students and alumnae, but on the beauty of the college plant and surroundings.

When Mrs. Indiana Fletcher Williams died she left her property to four trustees to establish a school for young women in memory of her daughter, Daisy Williams. With three other men they formed the Board of Directors. They had the job of transforming the plantation into an entire community. They ordered building plans from the Boston architectural firm of Gram, Goodhue and Ferguson for an entire campus plan, particularly for two dormitories, an academic building and a refectory. The plan which the firm developed was to eventually serve four to five hundred students.

The Virginia Georgian style buildings designed were "planned with special reference to the immediate locale and also to current styles." This style is characterized by its brick construction with high arched windows and limestone keys and pillars. The harmony of the first buildings corresponded to that in the color and texture of the bricks to the earth around the structures, as the bricks for the buildings prior to 1956 were burnt on the property from regional clay.

buildings had been added to the original four. This rapid growth was not only due to the growth of the enrollment, which of course was the reason for expansion, but construction proceeded so quickly because of the "fact that (they) had a plan for a harmonious group of buildings ... saved much discussion that the erection of a new building often occasions in a college." Since these seven were built, "the college policy has been to allow activities to develop as far as possible in existing quarters and then to try to provide a new home for them, rather than to build generously and seek to develop within the new capacity." The original plan was followed exactly with these new structures.

The first buildings were described as having a truly stately appearance with symmetrical and harmonious style, dignified but not severe. It was stated before the building plans were made that "there should be nothing of the new and raw to offend the senses, but every spot, every object should make its aesthetic appeal." This was because they had yet no reputation to attract students. It had to "appeal for patronage by the reputation of its teachers and by the beauty of its plant and surroundings."

It was also felt that "living with beauty does not leave one untouched" as "attractive surroundings and artistic buildings

have a profound and lasting influence on the hearts and minds

of young girls just emerging into womanhood." The plans drawn by Mr. Cram brought these ideas closer to reality, and as they were built the dormitories were named? and this gave each its own distinction. No longer were they figures on paper.

As the buildings developed, so did the reputation of the college. It was no longer as necessary to continue building such stately structures for those reasons, but the architectural unity was firmly established in the main collegiate buildings, and so it remained.

At the beginning, Sweet Briar House was to be used as the administrative building. The plantation home of Mrs. Williams, it was remodeled by her father in 1851 to resemble an Italian dwelling. The Board of Directors did not intend for it to conform to the Georgian architecture, as they did Mt. San Angelo. They extensively remodeled this building, and it was intended as the President's home, but in 1906 Dr. Mary K. Benedict, the college's first president, elected to live at Sweet Briar House.

The faculty apartments and houses slowly spread to the east of the main college buildings. These dwellings were also constructed of Sweet Briar brick in the Georgian manner. In 1921 four stucco houses were built on the south side of the 'Faculty Row' and were much criticized "for their looks, which ... suggest no identifiable style." These four and Sweet Briar House are some of the very few buildings which do not coincide with the prevailing architecture.

By 1923 the college had a large debt, and additional dorm-

itories, allowing for more income were desireable, but with this would come the need for more classroom space. In 1924 construction began on both. The Board was also planning much future growth at this time, and special attention was paid to the need of a gymnasium, a library, and a chapel. 10

The academic building, with room for administrative offices was built in place of the art building in the original plan and was designed similarly to the existing academic building. Space between these two was planned for the construction of a library. The new dormitory was built across from the Refectory, beside Grammer. This placement was the first which was different than the original plan, though only slightly and was approved by the Boston firm.

These buildings were ready for use by September 1925. The students were then collecting funds for a gymnasium, but college officials gave their next building priority to a desperately needed library. In 1928, Fergus Reid announced that he intended to give the college just that, in memory of his mother, Mary Helen Cochran.

This building seems to be the first to feel the economic strain. Numerous alterations in the architects plans were necessary to reduce the cost of the building, but none were made which would have changed the general appearance of it. 13

Also in 1928, Cram and Ferguson drew up a new Plot Plan for the development of the college. This reflects the changes in the college's needs as it matured.

This same year, a million dollar campaign was launched to raise funds for endowment and future buildings. Added to the list of necessary buildings at this time were another dormitory, a science hall and a music and fine arts building. 15 The library was completed by September 1929 and concentration was then centered on the Gymnasium, with tennis courts and an indoor swimmin; pool. The first mention of it was in 1923, but it was not until 1930 that formal preparations began. It was to be located "to the south of Sunset Road", facing Sweet Briar House. The original plans were then very much altered as this was away from the rest of the campus group, but the architectural style remained. The building has "a main entrance not unlike that of Fergus Reid Hall, with a large central section and low wings on either end, somewhat like the Mary Helen Cochran Library plan," and "is to be Georgian in design, of brick and the characteristic touches of white or Indiana limestone corresponding to the other buildings."16 The funds were slowly adding up, but it was found that there was still not enough money for the swimming pool. The exterior wall was left unfinished with hopes of adding the pool within a few Those few years developed into forty-four, as other building projects took priority. The main area of the structure was ready for use in September 1931.17

In 1935 all of the academic departments and numerous committies were asked to report what they considered necessary improvements for the college, for what the administration termed the "Ten-Year Plan."

Some suggestions in these reports were that a science building be built "in a location ... off the quadrangle" as "Greenhouses, Animal Hutches, etc. are difficult to harmonize with a formal group of buildings." Here also was the first suggestion that an auditorium be combined with a fine arts building. The students suggested that an auditorium be placed opposite Academic in the original location of the Gymnasium, and that a science building be "placed and constructed in the architecture originally planned." This was the only mention in all of the reports of continuing the formal quadrangle suggested in 1902.

No action was taken on any recommendations for the physical growth of the plant. As it was from 1912 to 1925, no major construction took place between 1931 and 1956.

Final plans for a seventh dormitory were drawn in 1947, after Martha Lucas, fourth president of the college, wrote to several colleges asking for advice about the proposed building, in particular, advice on "the best way of selecting an architect if a 'functional' interior is desired but the exterior must conform to an established Georgian plan for the campus." 19

At the fiftieth anniversary of the granting of the charter, a broad Development Program was formed in order that in 1956, some physical manifestation of the college's growth could represent the celebration of the anniversary of the opening of the school. Committees were formed to study each of the necessities. 20

The dormitory was the only building then proposed which was

constructed for the 1956 celebration. During the twenty-five year halt in the college growth, many aspects of construction and building design had changed. For the first time everyone was involved in the plans for the dormitory, as they were all asked to contribute suggestions; the bricks were not made on the property, as transportation had so improved it was much more economical to buy them; a new architectural firm was named, that of Moore and Hutchins, Inc., of New York City.; 21 and the college received its first grant from a corporation, Standard Oil Company, to help finance the building. 22

The architects placed the building adjoining Reid, opposite Grammer. Of the requirements given them by the administration, one was that the "relation in architectural composition to the campus buildings, and in particular to the South Dorm group" be a strong one. The windows in the building are a slightly different size than those in the older dormitories, for greater interior light, but this is the only major change in the facade of the building. "The exterior brick harmonizes ... and maintains the established architectural character of the campus." 23

An auditorium had long been desired, and was built in 1961 after long studies of possible sites and designs by the architects, Clark, Nexsen and Owen of Lynchburg. 24 Since the original plans had been so altered, the lengthy discussions saved by them were a thing of the past. When the architects recommended Site A in November 1959 because the location west of the Gym was the most economical, and because the size of the building

was considered too large to be placed near the older buildings, construction began. An anonymous Southern foundation gave much of the necessary money, 25 and the building was ready for use in 1961.

Shortly before the Babcock Fine Arts Center was finished, construction began on a new dormitory with a dining facility on the ground floor. Many lengthy studies of the college's future needs were done before this decision was finally reached. 25 Five separate plans were analyzed of the need for a chapel along with the dining hall and dormitory. This L-shaped building was to be located South of Grammer, Reid and Dew halls, 27 and was ready for use by the fall of 1962.

Studies were also conducted for the proposed science building. One item viewed strongly in the architects study was that of "Aesthetic considerations." It was stated that "the scale and character of the Science Building will best fit into the design of the Mary Reynolds Babcock Building, rather than the very much smaller scaled Fletcher Hall" and also that "it will be entirely suitable to economize with a flat roof on (it) recalling the flat roofs on the wings of the Mary Reynolds Babcock Building." In an earlier study it was noted "that a building away from the central campus might be acceptable in a modern (and probobly less expensive) style of architecture."

Due to the constantly rising construction costs, the Science Building is the only building about which mention of a totally new and different style has been made. The Committee formed in 1957 to study this building was "in favor of putting money on the inside of the building rather than on the outside" and they recommended "that the building ... be of cinderblock construction, with the possibility of adding a brick facing at a later date."

Many corporations gave grants for this building, and mr. Buford Scott, a member of the Board of Directors, offered two challenge grants totalling \$100,000. With these large contributions it was possible to build a brick structure and thus harmonize it somewhat with the other campus buildings, though its expansive windows and flat roof do not coincide with the prevailing Virginia Georgian style. 28 It was ready for use in September 1965.

Plans were then being finalized for a college chapel. It was to be located in the original plans between dormitories four and five, and without prior knowledge of this, Oliver and Smith, Architects of Norfolk, Virginia, recommended this site. The original facade of the building was very much simplified as otherwise it overpowered the size of the structure. The building was completely funded by memorial donations ranging from one dollar to \$50,000.²⁹ The first Sunday morning service was held in the Sweet Briar Memorial Chapel on April 17, 1966. As it was favorable for attendance to be near the dormitories, this building had to conform with the older architecture, with no means of modernizing the exterior, but this is often desired in a place of worship.

In 1965 plans were drawn for an addition to the overcrowded

Library. The architect, Mr. J. Russell Bailey of Grange, Virginia, is an authority on libraries and stated that he has "made no attempt to change the existing architectural style." his construction project, like the chapel, was bound to one site, and therefore had to conform to the prevailing style. In 1967 this was occupied.

The most recent building, after fourty-four years is the swimming pool addition to the Gym. Charles N. Prothro, chairman of the Board of Overseers, offered a challenge grant in celcbration of the seventy-fifth anniversary of the opening of the college in 1976. The cornerstone ceremony was conducted that year, but the facility was not ready for use until the summer of 1977. Again, there were no choices to be made of location and the architecture needed to conform with the existing structure.

The college plant developed slowly and the changes in the architecture and economic situations are evident as we follow the chronological order of the construction and the locations of the buildings. The original campus plan was extremely important in the construction of the plant, as the Georgian style was intended for all of the buildings and once a style is established it is often difficult to make great alterations to it. The changes are only possible as we break away from the original location, as seen in the construction of the Guion Science Building.

As the physical plant grew, so too did the amount of planning involved. The architects requirements have always included the fact that the exterior must harmonize with the existing buildings, but the interpretation of the word 'harmony' seems to have been altered. In the first thirty years of the college's building program it seemed to mean 'conformity', whereas in the past thirty years it has taken on the looser meaning of 'similarity'. The availability, desirability and practicality of building materials have changed, and they often are found to rule over all other factors. This makes good decisions for useful and attractive buildings difficult to reach.

Sweet Briar College is situated in the country, and there has never been the desire of destroying or greatly altering the scenic beauty. The Virginia Georgian architecture has been preserved and nurtured to add to, rather than changed greatly to detract from this area of the country.

- 1. These trustees were the Right Reverend A.M. Handolph, the Reverend J.M. Carson, Stephed R. Harding, and the Reverend Arthur P. Gray. The original Board of Directors also included Dr. John M. McBryde, the Reverend Dr. Carl E. Grammer and Judge Legh R. Watts. Martha Lou Stohlman, The Story of Sweet Briar College (Sweet Briar, Virginia: Sweet Briar Alumnae Association, 1956), p.42-43.
 - 2. See Appendix A, p.1.
- 3. Meta Glass, President, "A Report on the Development, Activities, and the Present Status of the College", <u>Bulletin of Sweet Briar College: Sweet Briar College 1943</u>, Vol. 26, No. 2, May 1943, p.23.
- 4. Mary K. Benedict, "Sweet Briar 1906-1916", Sweet Briar Alumnae News (now Sweet Briar Alumnae Magazine), Vol.7, No.2, Dec. 1937, p.5.
 - 5. Glass, p.24.
 - 6. Stohlman, pp.227, 52, 53.
- 7. See Appendix A, p.1. All were early members of the Board of Directors.
- 8. This was the home of Mrs. Williams' sister, and adjoins the college property. It was sold in 1909 and bought back by the college in 1969. "San Angelo Property Purchased By College", Bulletin of Sweet Briar College: Sweet Briar Newsletter, Vol. 52, No. 4, Feb. 1969, p.1.
 - 9. Stohlman, p. 144.
- 10. "Sweet Briar Plant Grows", The News (Lynchburg, Virginia), 9 Nov. 1924.
- 11. The new dormitory was named for Fergus Reid, a member of the Board of Directors since 1904, the new academic building was named Fletcher Hall, in honor of Mrs. Williams' father. See Appendix A, p.1.
- 12. The Books were first held in a large room in Academic, and later a temporary building was placed behind Academic for this purpose. "The New Music Building", Bulletin of Sweet Briar College: Alumnae News 1930-31, Vol.13, No.1, March 1930, p.17.
 - 13. See Appendix B, p.1.

C.

14. See Appendix A, p.2. The firm's name was changed from Cram, Goodhue and Ferguson but the exact date is not known.

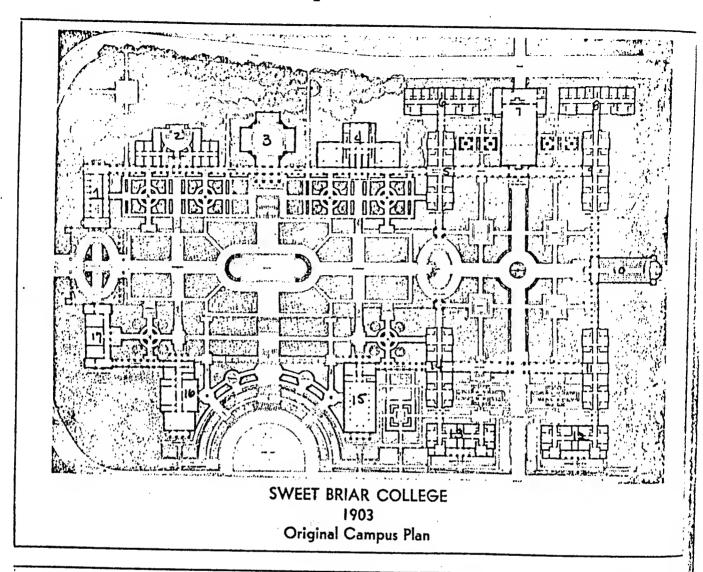
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- 15, Clark, Nexsen and Owen, Architects and Engineers, Campus Flanning Vol. I 1922-1968, under "Sweet Briar College 1928", p.6.
- 16. Harriet Howell Rogers, "A Tour Through the Gym", Bulletin of Sweet Briar College: Alumnae News, Vol.14, No. 1, March 1931, p.11.
- 17. The building is named the Daisy Williams Gymnasium, in memory of the founder's daughter for whom the college was established.
- 18. "Ten-Year Plan Suggestions from Departments and Individuals- 1935". File of reports including: Biology Department, Jan. 22, 1935; Dean, March 27, 1935; Students.
- 19. To the presidents of: Goucher; Radcliff; Smith; University of Richmond (Westhampton); Wheaton. Letter from Martha Lucas, President of Sweet Briar College, July 22,1947. File: Master Plan: Dormitory.
 - 20. See Appendix B, p.2.
- 21. "William Bland Dew Dormitory", Sweet Brian Alumnae News, Vol.24, No.4, March 1955,p.18.
- 22. "Randolph-Nacon, Sweet Briar Get Oil Firm Grants", The News (Lynchburg, Virginia), 14 Jan. 1956.
- 23. The building was named for William Bland Dew, the first treasurer of the college. See Appendix A, pp.1 and 3. See also Robert S. Hutchins, FAIA, of Moore and Hutchins, Architects, "William Bland Dew Dormitory: I; As Seen by the Architect", Sweet Briar Alumnae News, Vol.26, No.4, March 1957, p.2.
- 24. See Appendix A, pp. 4-6, and Appendix C, p.1. The architectural firm of Clark and Crowe were consulting architects from the beginning, and had individually designed some of the minor college buildings. In 1956 the name was changed to Clark, Nexsen and Owen.
- 25. See Appendix B, pp. 3-5. The money given was in honor of Mary Reynolds Babcock, for whom the foundation was established. The college named the building for her in appreciation of this large donation.
- 26. Since 1925 students had eaten in the Refectory and in a dining room in the basement of Reid.

- 27. See Appendix A, p.7., Appendix B, p.6., and Appendix C, pp.1-2. Clark, Nexsen and Owen were the architects for this building, named for Meta Glass, third President of the college.
- 28. See Appendix A, pp. 8-9, Appendix B, p.7., and Appendix C.,p.1. Clark, Vol.I. 1922-1968, under "Science Building",p.4. and "Master Plan: General" File including: Report of the Architect,p.3.; Report of the Science Building Committee, May 17, 1957. The building was named for Connie Guion, the school's second chemistry teacher.
 - 29. See Appendix B, p.3.
- 30. Sweet Briar Alumnae Magazine, Vol. 35, No. 2., Nov. 1965, p.18.
 - 31. See Appendix A, pp.10-11, and Appendix C, p.4.

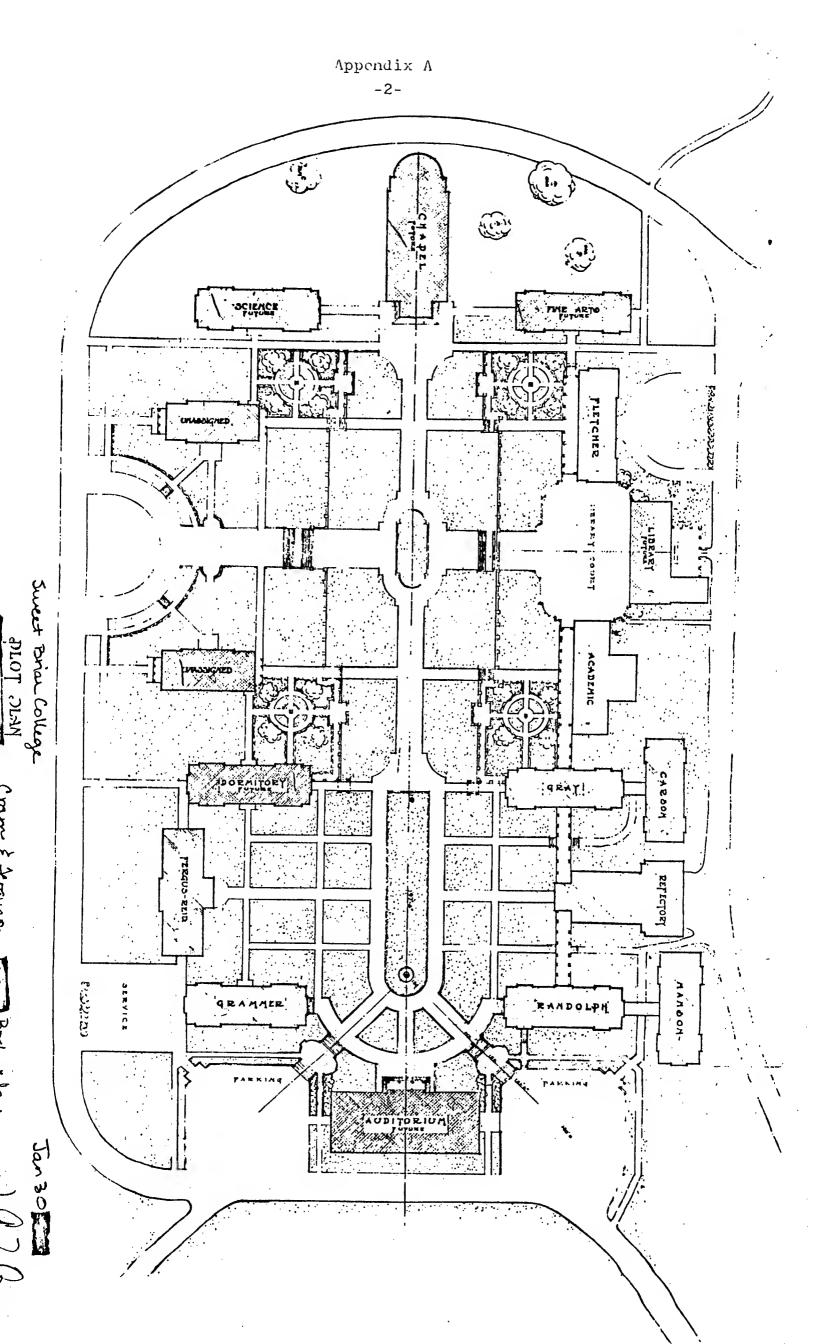
APPENDIX A

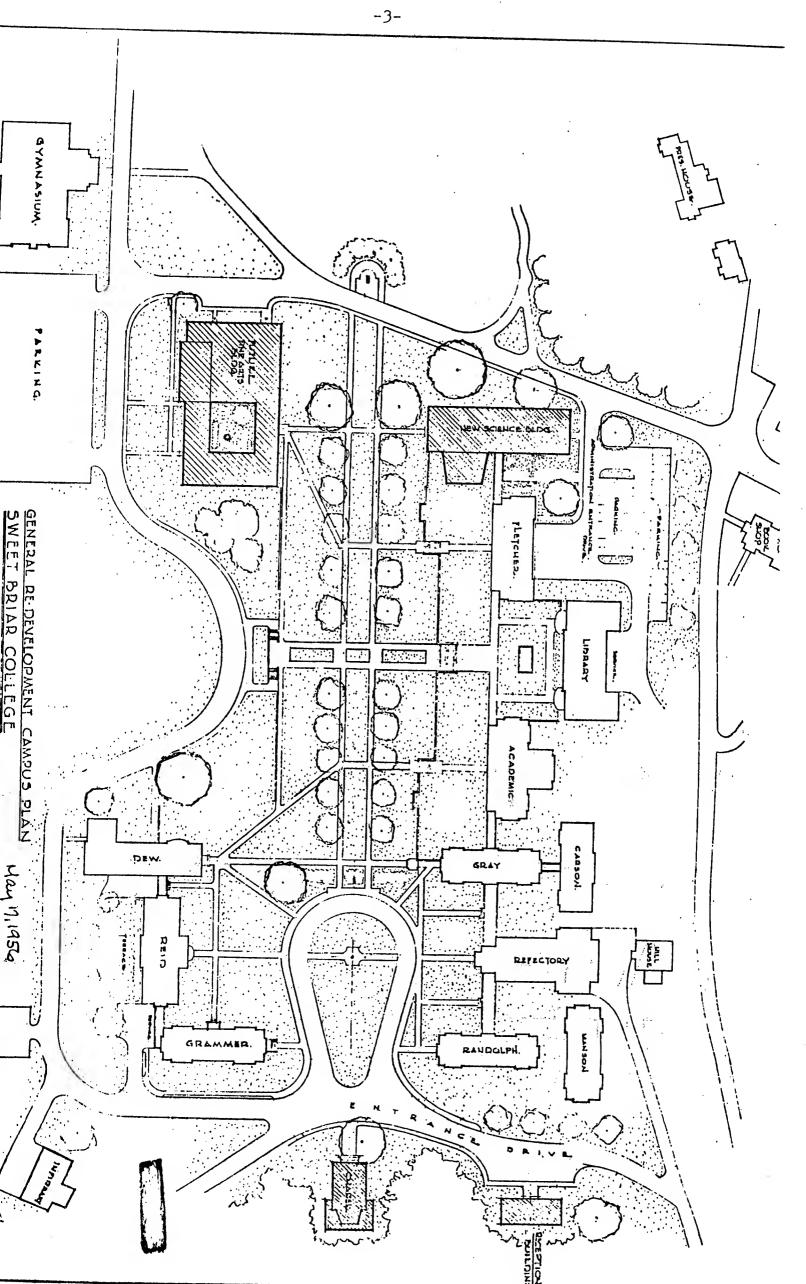
Plans for the Future Development of the College

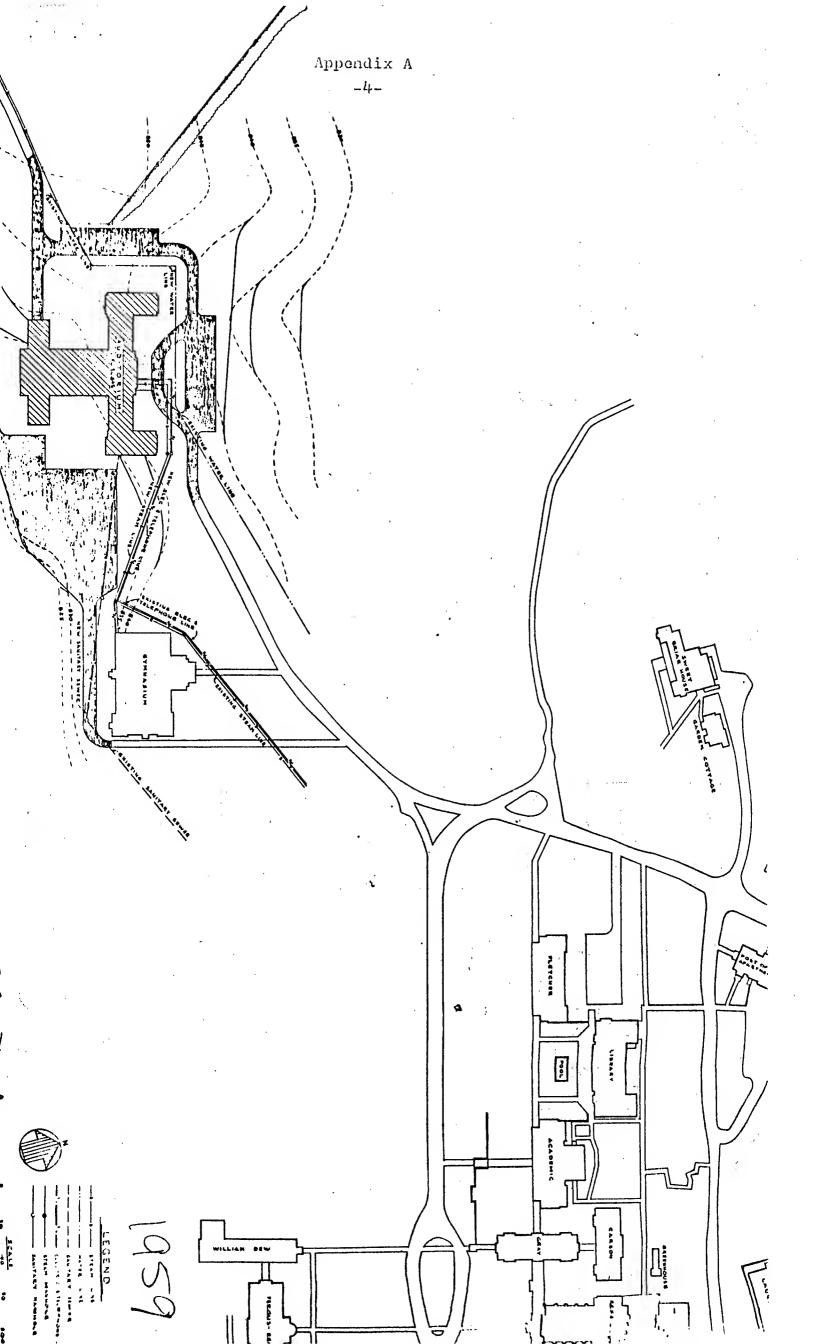


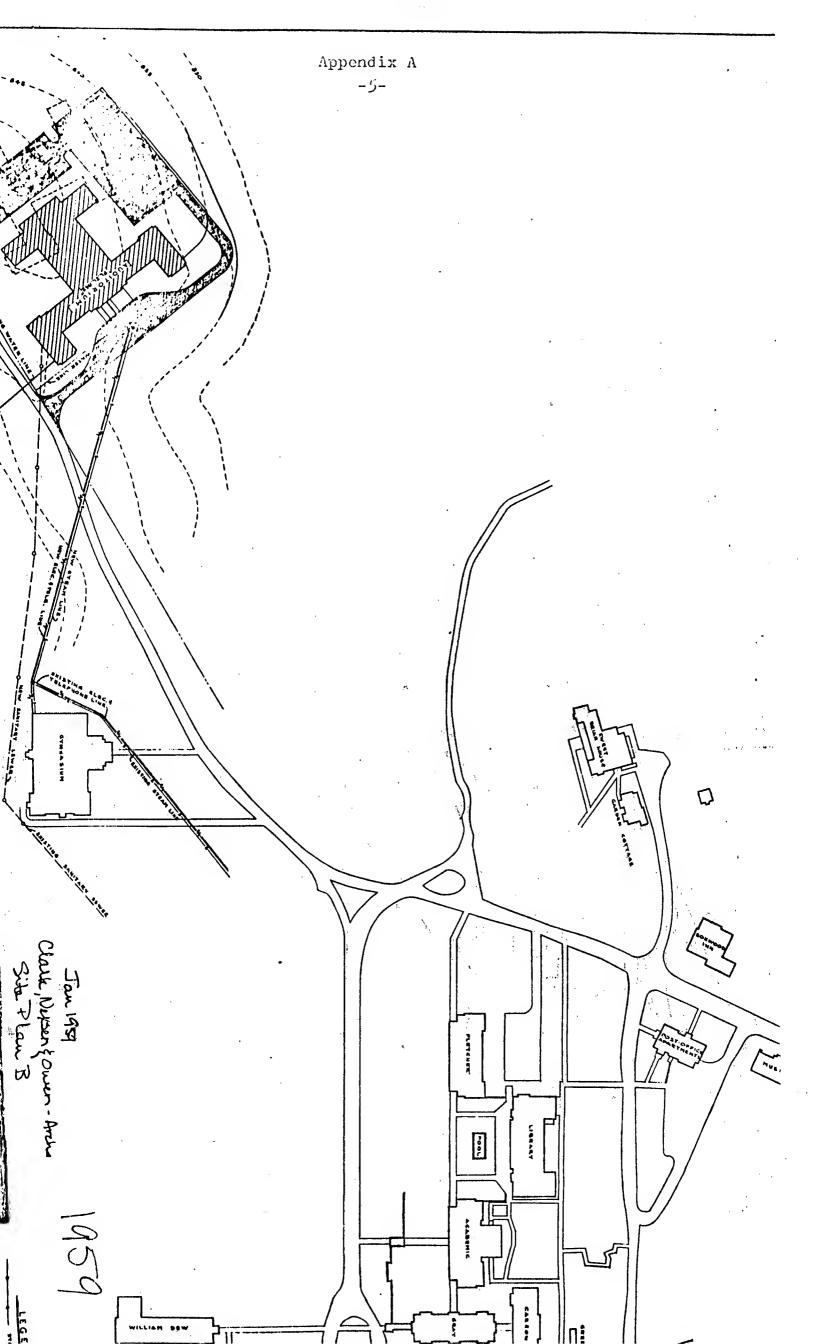
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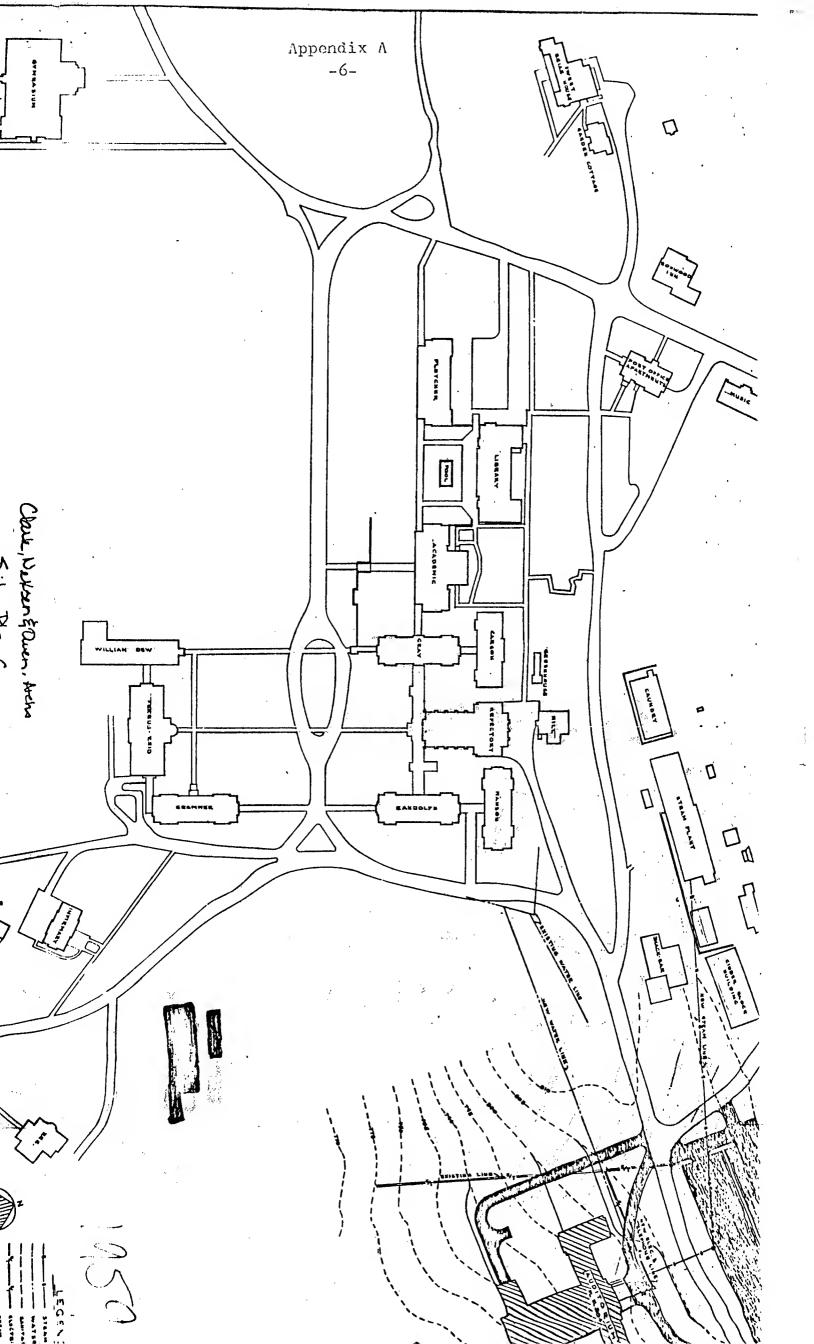
- 1.-Library
 2.-Art Building
 3.-Commencement Hall
 4.-Academic Building
 (Academic, now Benedict)
 5.-Dormitory No. 1
 (Gray)
 6.-Dormitory No. 2
 (Carson)
 7.-Refectory
 8.-Dormitory No. 3
 (Manson)
 9.-Dormitory No. 4
 (Randolph)
 10.-Chapel (Memorial Chapel)
 11.-Dormitory No. 5
 (Grammer)
- 12.-Dormitory No. 6
 13.-Dormitory No. 7
 14.-Dormitory No. 8
 15.-Gymnasium
 16.-Science Building
 17.-Industrial Building

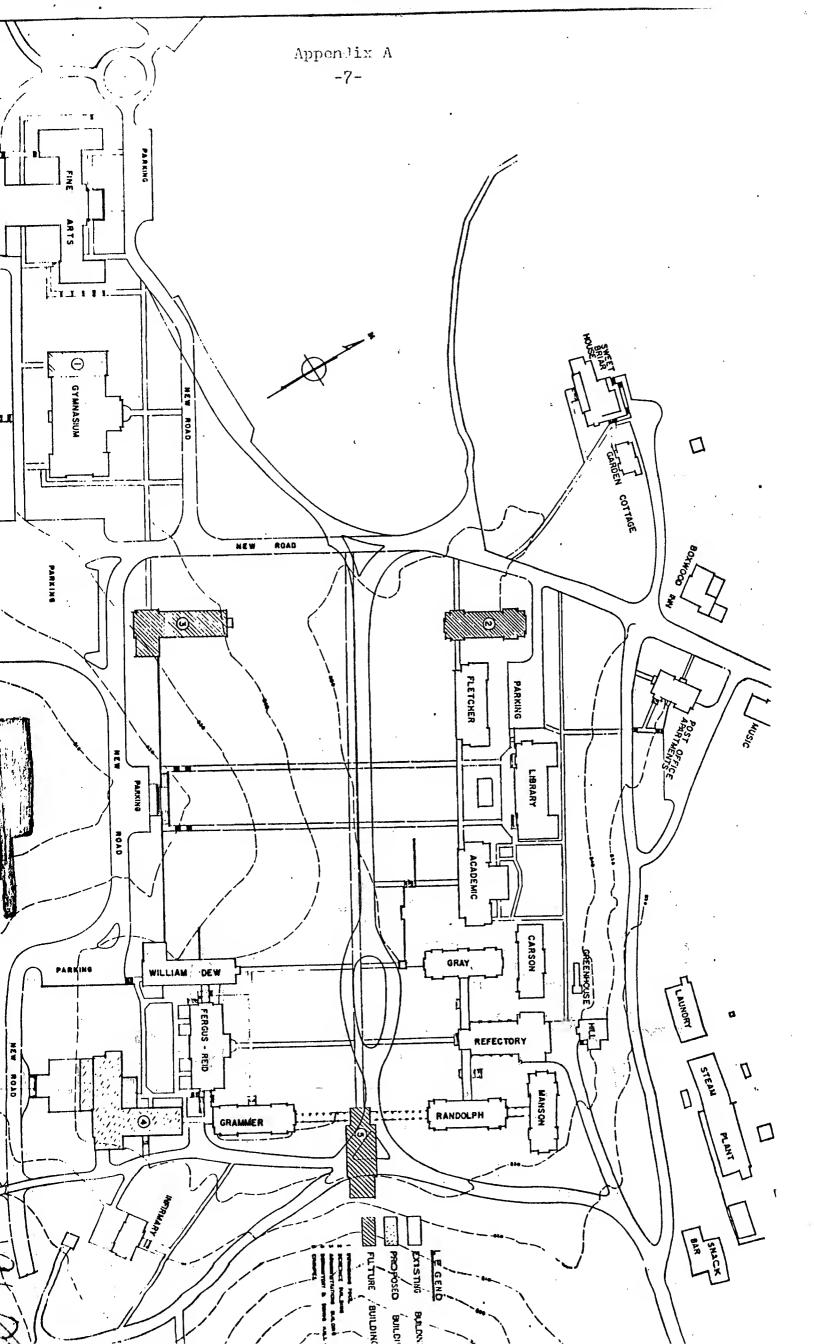


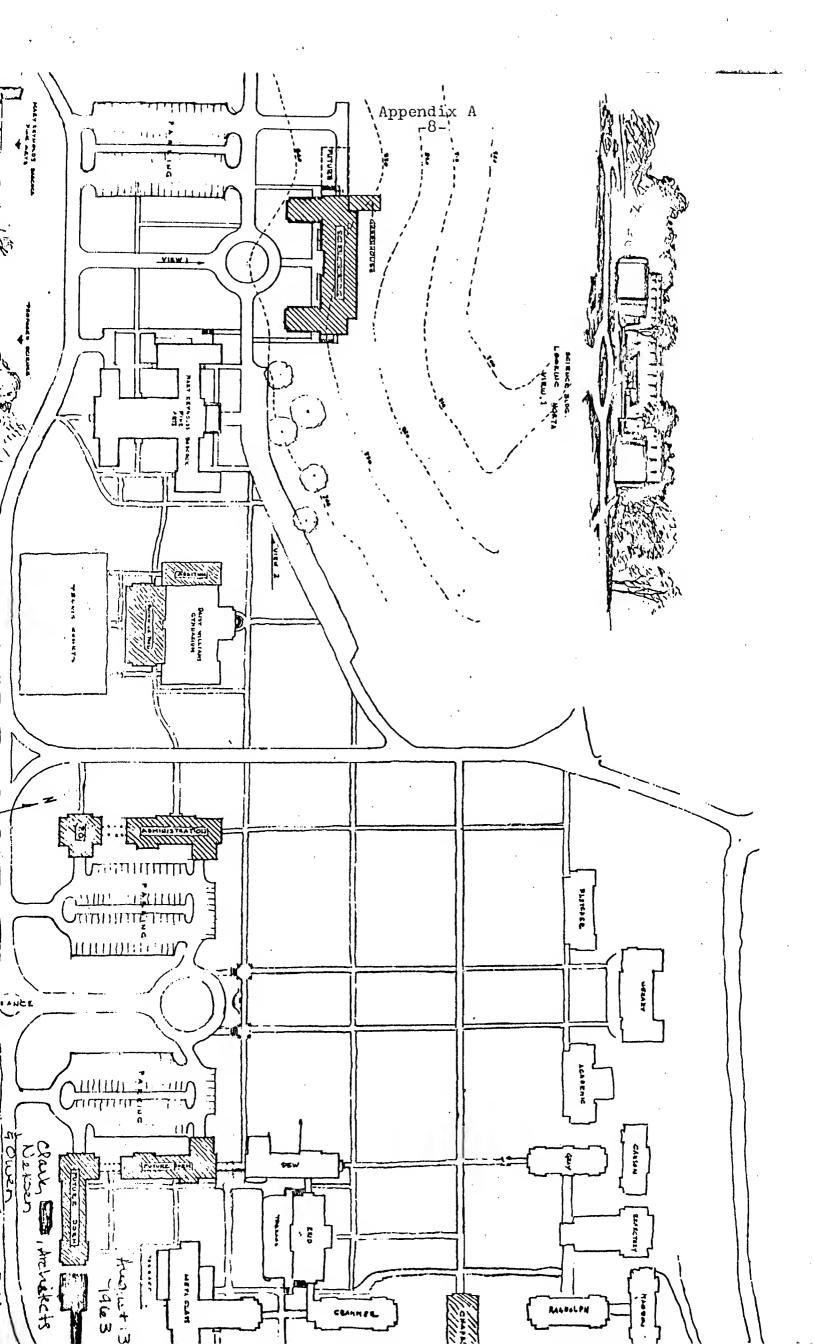


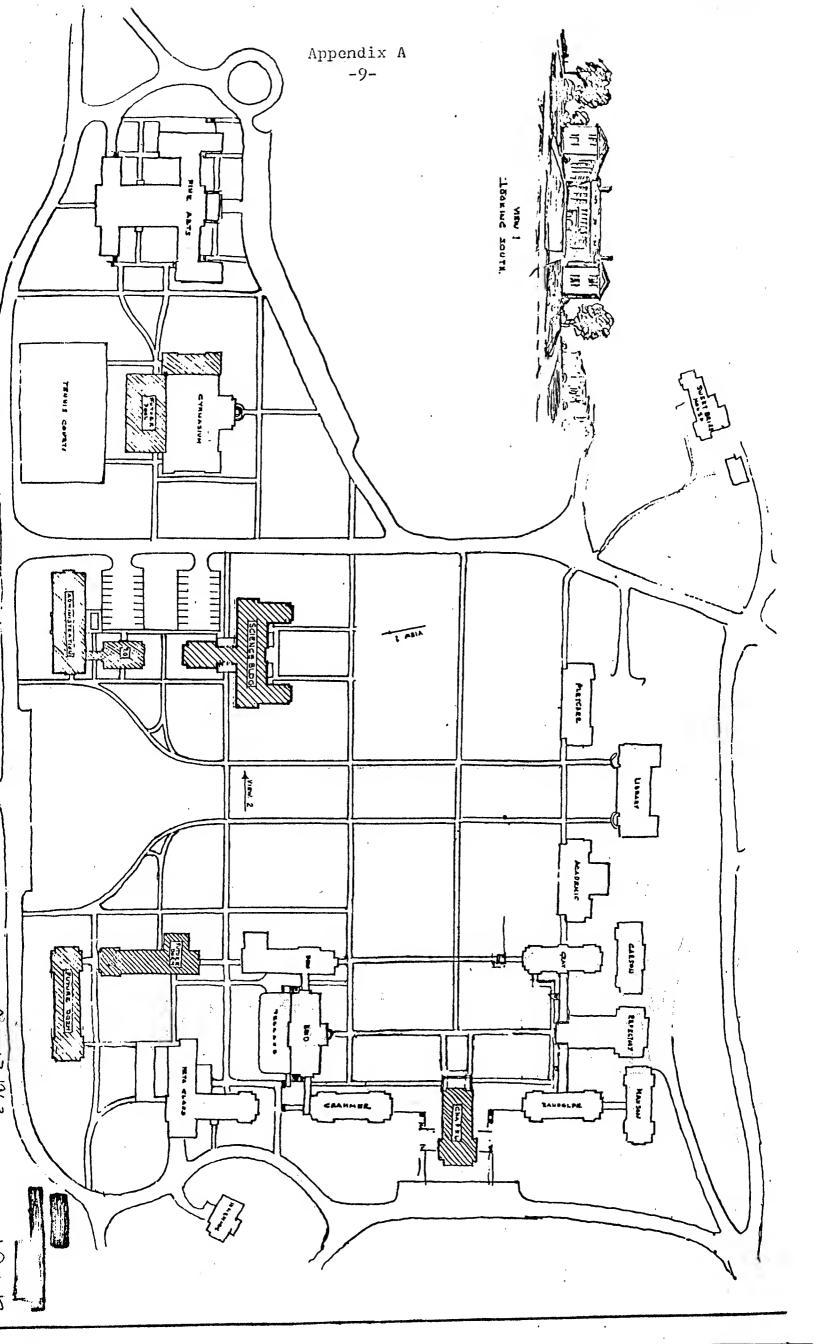


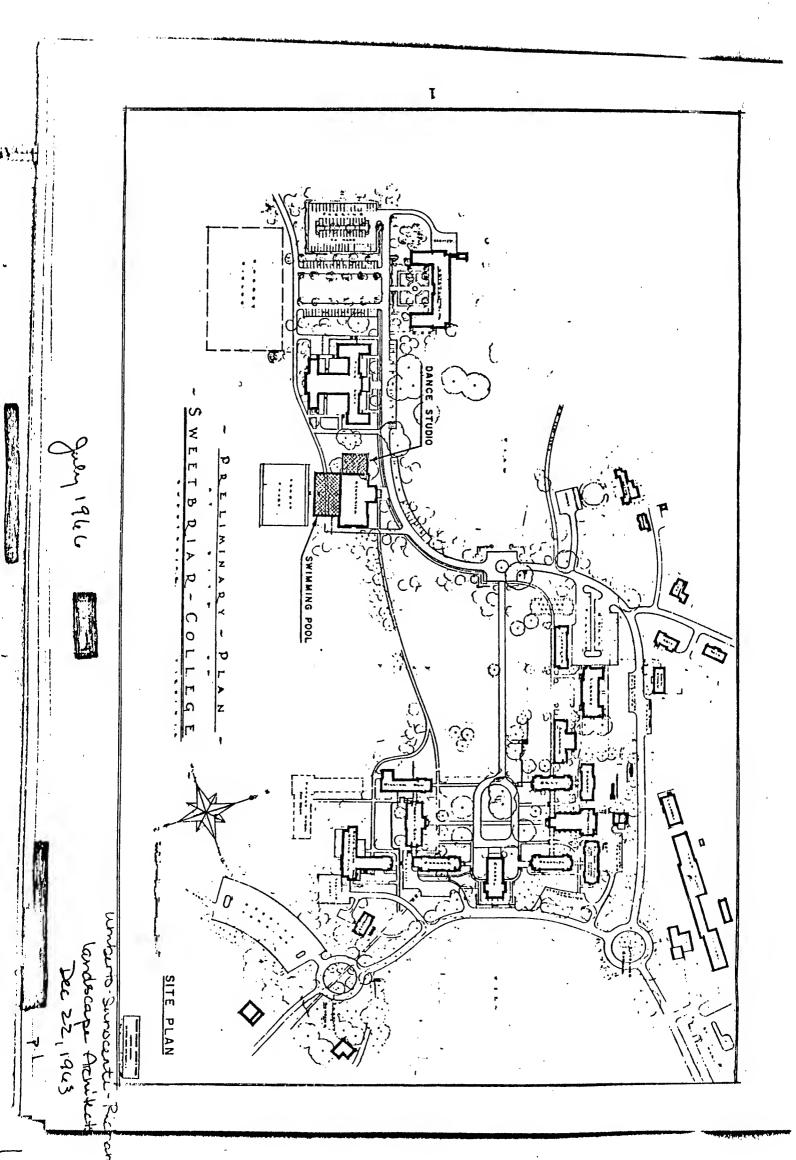




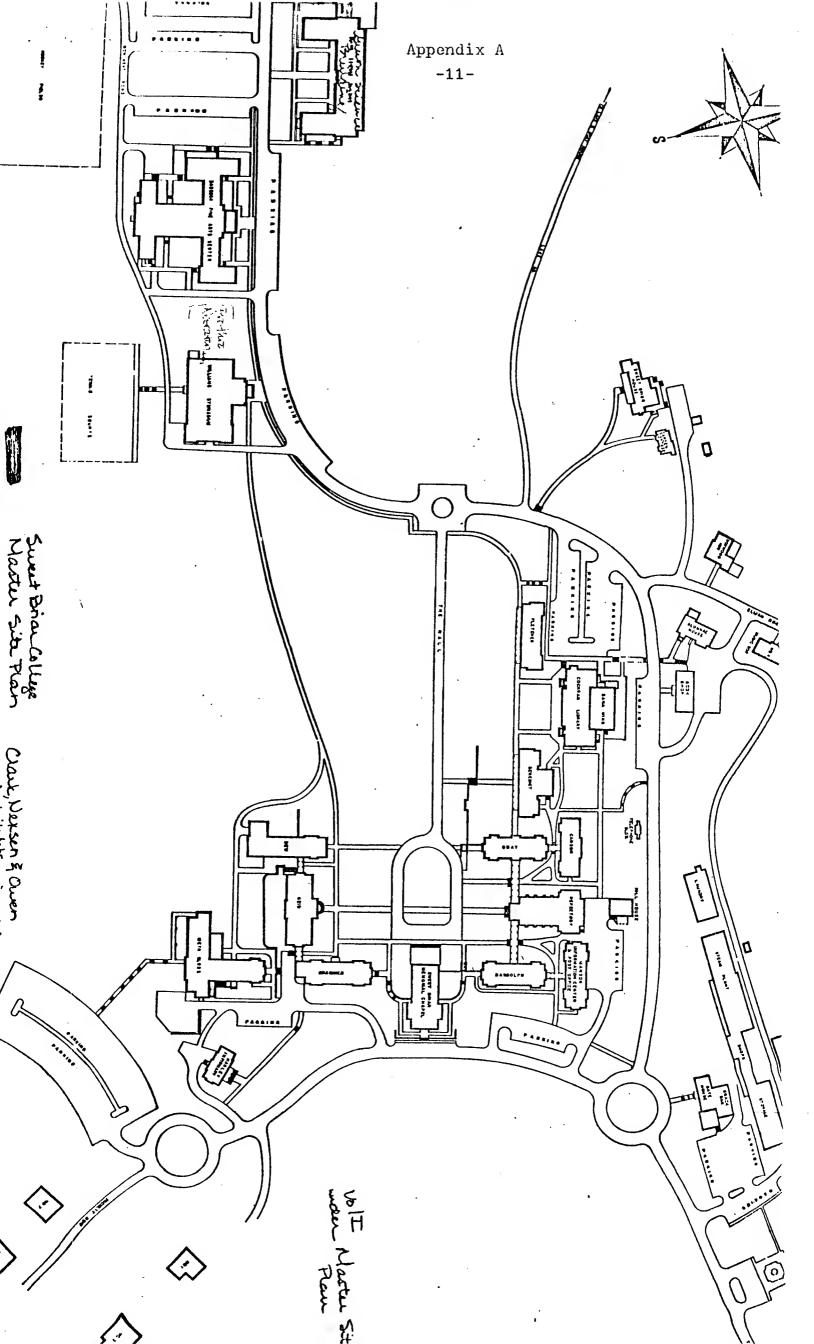








203



APPENDIX B

Tables, Plans and Site Analyses

Appendix B

-1-

Changes in Plans and Specifications - Library

Exteriors	
1) Substitute cast stone for limestone	00
2) Change arches over all windows, except those on South Elevation, to brick with stone keys, and omit all stone on chimney and vent stack except caps	
3) Omit metal weather strips	0
4) Use wood baluster, rail and newels instead of cast stone, but surbase and base remaining cast stone	
Total: \$9,075.0	0

Appendix B

-2-

Committees to Study Future Needs of the College

COMMI	TTEE	то	STUDY:						CHAI	RMAN:
Plans	for	an	Additi	onal	Dorm	itor	у	• • • •	Dean	Pearl
Plans	for	an	Admini	strat	ion	Bui1	ding	• • • •	Wr.	Vornam
Plans	for An	an cts	Audito: Center	rium	and	Fine	• • • •	• • • • •	Mrs.	Gilchrist
Plans	for	a (Chapel.	• • • •	• • • •	• • • •	• • • •	• • • • •	Nirs.	Rollins
Plans	for Pr	the ese	e Modern ent Plan	nizat nt	ion	of t	he		Mr.	√ornam
Plans	for	a S	Science	Buil	ding		• • • •		Miss	Belcher
			Student							

Aspects of the Three Proposed Sites of the Auditorium-Fine Arts Center

SITE A

Favorable:

1) The most economical site.

2) The building is a part of the campus and should be in alignment with the Gym as well as other buildings.

3) Faces north giving proper light to the studios in the Art department.

4) The stage house is not seen from the campus.

5) The stage house can be serviced from the east or the west.

6) The landscape is beneficial.

7) The utilities are available.

8) No rock encountered in test pits.

Total Cost: \$38,022.00 + \$12,000.00 tennis courts

Final Cost: \$50,022.00

Objections:

1) The tennis courts will have to be moved.

2) The building interferes with the operation of the Gym department and the Hockey field.

3) The building is so far away from dormitories that there will be very limited attendance.

4) The interval between classes may have to be increased.

5) If a new entrance road is built to the south of the campus, the stage house will be seen.

Aspects of the Three Proposed Sites of the Auditorium-Fine Arts Center

SITE B

Favorable:

1) Possibly the loveliest location.

2) All favorable items under Site A could be listed under this.

3) Tennis courts would remain in present location.

- 4) The Committee on Plans for an Auditorium and Fine Arts Center, May 1958, recommended this site, as this "location would open a new section of the campus,...would provide the required north light for art studios without prejudicing the front exterior... with a large expanse of glass and sawtooth skylights."
- 5) Park 75 cars now with room for expansion.
- 6) No rock encountered in test pits.

Total Cost: \$66,254.00

Objections:

- 1) The building would terminate the grouping of the campus and prevent further development in this direction.
- 2) The building is so far away from dormitories that there will be very limited attendance.
- 3) The interval between classes may have to be increased.
- 4) If a new entrance road is built to the south of the campus, the stage house will be seen.

Aspects of the Three Proposed Sites of the Auditorium-Fine Arts Center

SITE C

Favorable:

1) The land rapidly slopes, and there is room for adequate parking expansion.
2) The public would be held out

of the college.

3) The building would be closer to the dormitories for better attendance.

Objections:

1) It would be difficult to obtain proper area and light without extensive clearing of trees.

2) Large and expensive foundations would be needed.

3) This building would not be a part of the campus group.

Total Cost: \$57,707,60 (Foundations: 135 cubic yards @ \$100.00 = \$13,500.00)

Possibilities for the Development of A Dining Hall, A Chapel, and A Dormitory

I: A. Refectory enlarged to seat 675.

B. New dormitory for 150 students.

C. New Chapel.

D. Reid Dining Room converted to a Recreation Room. Total Cost: \$1,540,000.00

II: A. Refectory converted to Chapel.

B. New Dining Hall between Randolph and Grammer to seat 675.

C. New dormitory for 150 students.

- D. Reid Dining Room converted to a Recreation Room. Total Cost: \$1,715,000.00
- III:A. Leave Refectory as it is.

B. New Chapel.

C. New dormitory for 150 students.

- D. Reid Dining Room expanded to seat 350. Total Cost: \$1,400,000.00
- IV: A. Leave Refectory as it is.

B. New Chapel.

C. Reid Dining Room converted to a Recreation Room.

D. New dormitory for 150 students with a Dining Room to seat 350. Total Cost: \$1,510,000.00

A. Refectory converted to Chapel.

B. New dormitory for 150 students with a Dining Room to seat 675. C. Reid Dining Room converted to a Recreation Room.

Total Cost: \$1,490,000.00

Aspects of the Two Proposed Sites of the Science Building

SCHEME A

Favorable:

- 1) Continues the normal growth of the campus.
- 2) Compliments Fine Arts activities.
- 3) Laboratories face north.4) Adequate area for future expansion.
- 5) Adequate parking facilities.6) Simplicity of design and less expensive.
- 7) Minimum of landscaping due to large trees and the beauty of the Dell.

Total Cost: \$94,300.00

Unfavorable:

- 1) Utilities cost more.
- 2) The interval between classes may have to be increased.

SCHEME B

Favorable:

- 1) Utilities cost minimum.
- 2) Less time needed for class change.
- 3) Completes formality of the campus.
- 4) Nearness to dormitories for students to study at night.

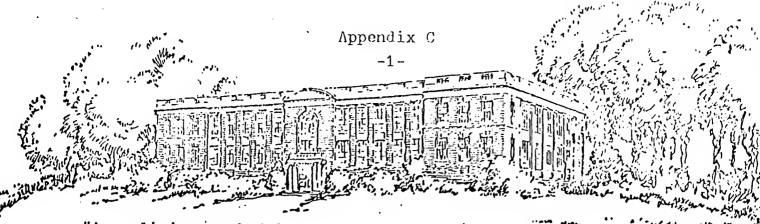
Total Cost: \$73,300.00

Unfavorable:

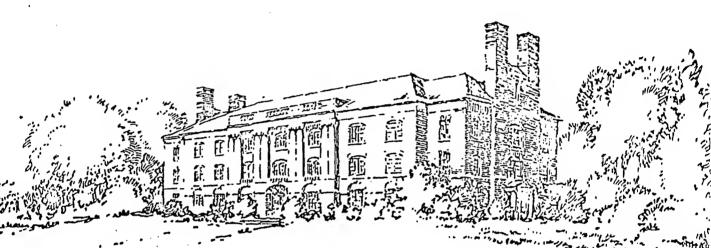
- Greenhouse this part of campus is unattractive.
- 2) Building is large in scale for contiguous buildings.
- 3) Formal Georgian architecture is more expensive.
- 4) Limited parking space.
- 5) Future expansion would be difficult.

APPENDIX C

Elevations of Proposed Buildings Which Were Not Used



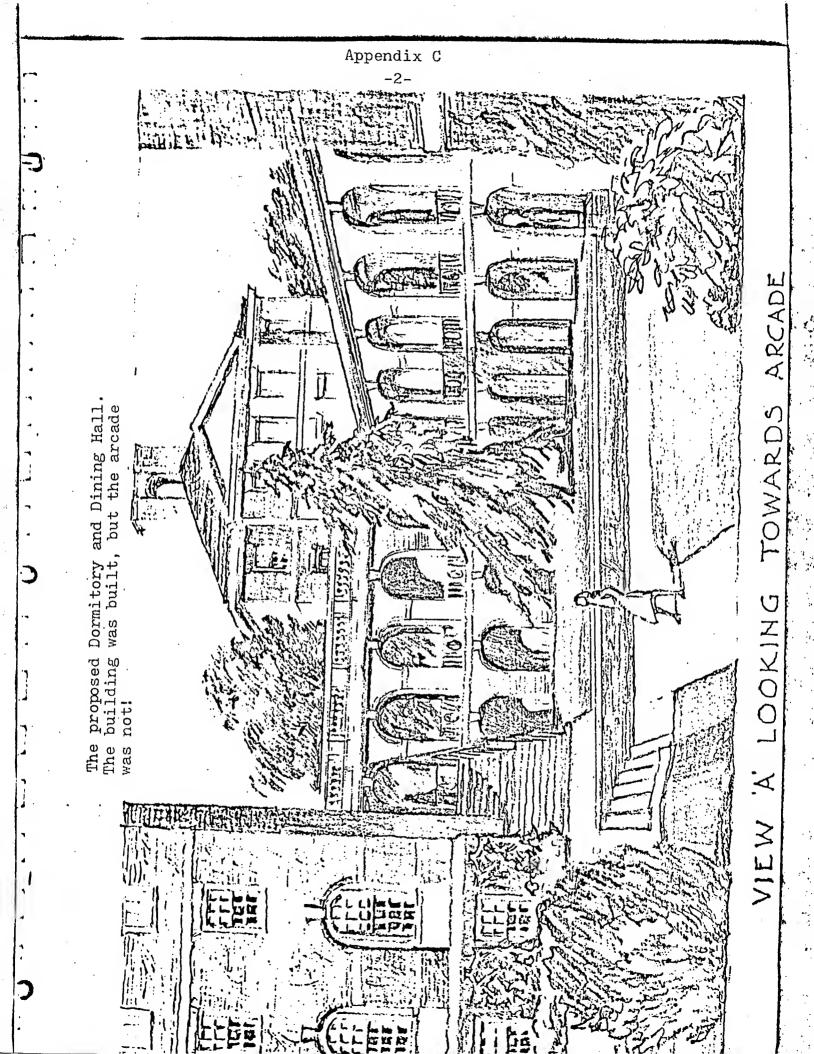
"A preliminary sketch of the new Science Building

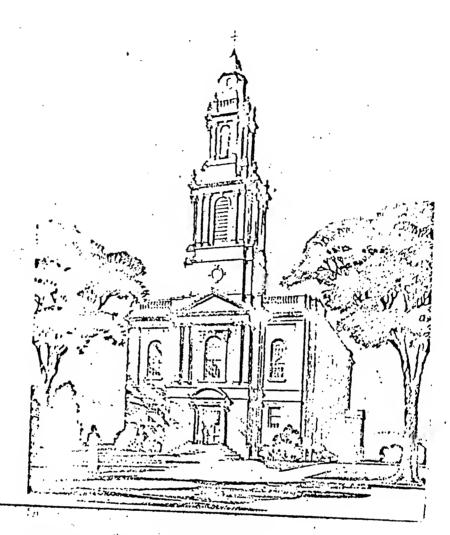


"An exterior design for the new Dormitory"



"An artist's sketch from the files of the planning committeessuggested exterior design for the proposed Auditorium-Arts Building"





"Sweet Briar's Future Chapel"

Exterior view - Swimming Pool

